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ABSTRACT

The paper describes the perspective of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services on special education research. The process for reviewing research proposals is explained, along with procedures for selecting experts in the field for creating registers of reviewers. Also discussed are the number of points allocated to different criteria in the proposal review process, the difficulty in communicating federal government intentions to researchers, budgetary concerns, continuation proposals, and priority areas in special education research. The transcript of a question-and-answer session is appended to the paper and focuses on how research priorities are established, the balance between directed competitions and field-initiated competitions for federal grants, and ways in which feedback on proposed priorities is acquired is discussed. (JDD)

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View From OSERS

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In many ways, I'd rather just try to field questions, but there are a few things that people have asked that I address directly. So, I'd like to take half of the time to try to communicate what the Office is doing about some of the things people have expressed concerns about all year long, and then open the session for questions to see if we can share with you what may not be apparent, oftentimes, and you can help us, quite honestly, in our thinking. Often, when you have concerns about how the program can be improved, we've probably got even more concerns. Often our problem is that we are not quite sure how to solve that which we know is wrong. And these conversations, sometimes, can give us the confidence and direction to move. Often we have what I think of as "motion stubbornness." In the absence of any confidence, it takes quite a bit of force to move us, because sometimes the evil we know is less scary than the one we don't know, so that one becomes concerned about how much to refine the system, change the system, etc. I hope that our conversation will give us some direction in addressing some of the issues that I know continue to concern everybody.

Let me start in the context of the review system for a few minutes. Last year Tom and I said that we were going to examine the review process. Some of you, I am sure, had copies of some thinking that Tom put out on the review process. Internally, that material and input that we've received is being massaged into, "What actions could we take?" Let me talk right now only

for the research program, because in many ways, our ability to implement suggestions and the form that they should take is somewhat influenced by the particular programs. For example, DPP, because of its volume, nature, and purpose, faces a somewhat different situation than that which confronts us in the research program.

Last year, thanks to enormous effort by Doris Cargile to get out and update our pool of field readers, we now have a list of about 500 names in the file. One might say, "Boy, that's a pretty large database." Let me tell you, in this last year, I used every one of those names in trying to come up with the panels. That is, there were people who weren't available on the dates we asked about at the beginning of the year. Sometimes people weren't available for the dates, and we had plenty of people in one instance and not enough in another instance. In some areas, because of the number of people who make application to a particular competition, we exhaust rapidly the names available to us. That pool is none too big.

On the other hand, the department has not been able to grapple with the issue of the criteria for determining whether or not someone is an expert. That is, we will look at the vita for some correspondence to the areas of expertise checked as opposed to areas of interest, and make some cursory level of judgment that is not a terribly discriminating one. It's hard to look and say,

"Well, how many databased publications should make somebody an expert, as opposed to opinion articles that are published?" How many publications altogether, if that's the criterion? That process is one where the names in the pool are self-identified, and there is, at best, a cursory screening that occurs. Normally, if there is an issue where we can't make a judgment with the first screening, rather than discarding the vita, we send it back to the individual and say, "We're unable to make this connection. Could you provide us additional information?"

The proposal that has been put in front of us is to create registers, as you know. Those registers, in the area of research, will not be very limiting, because, in fact, we need that many reviewers. On the other hand, it gives us an opportunity to develop a process for creating those registers of reviewers, and our intent is to work with you in setting the criterion process by which the various registers would be created. But given the numbers of applications that we receive, and the number of people submitting, it's not going to be the equivalent of a standing panel. The reason we are using the term "register" is because we need multiple panels. We can't get around the problem of the volume of applications that need to be reviewed, which creates multiple panels. All of those involved in the paneling would be considered the register. That will be something which we will try to operationalize during the coming year. It is unclear, at this point, whether we can get it in

place even to pilot it. However, our hope is to be able to pilot it during the coming fiscal year on some competitions, at least, if we can get far enough along and are comfortable with that system.

The criteria: Up until now we've had Edgar (?) regulations. I know many of you have been in to review, as well as, obviously, writing applications. When you're writing the research application, you look at some of the criteria, such as evaluation, and you say, "What do those five points really mean, and what do they want?" We now have, as a result of some changes in our overall departmental regulations, the ability to remove some of the criteria, such as evaluation. And we'll be doing that. Again, we cannot do that this year without affecting all of the schedules for this coming fiscal year, but we will do it during this year so that they are in place for FY90 applications. And those changed evaluation criteria will be out there for comment.

One of the things we've heard, and have tried to correct, and seem to have overcorrected, is the number of points that we allocate to different types of criteria. For example, it used to be, if you remember, that we had 30 points on technical soundness. And then we increased it to 40 points. Well, the reason that happened was that we were beginning to see projects being funded that were seriously technically flawed, but that had good ideas. Well, now what's happening, when we look at the process, is that

we get projects that are technically sound, or even elegant, in my own thinking, but that are not looking, necessarily, at a very important problem. And we're not sure what to do. I'm not sure that 35 points is the answer--to split the difference. It would be nice and simple. I just don't have any comfort that that's going to fix the issue.

We've looked at two-stage review models, such as NSF, which starts with a pre-application review and then an invitation to an NID to those that make that first screen. Our type of model has two stages, where there is a review of the full applications, which determines their technical merit, and then a second review, which then works only with those that are technically meritorious. And that has its problems. But, we've been examining all the various systems, and we are trying to pick, we hope, the best of those choices. While we've had some communication with you, I wanted you to know that the issue has not died yet. We are seriously and cautiously working with it, so that, we hope, our solutions don't become worse than the problem.

Another aspect of the review system that we are increasingly aware of, is the difficulty of communicating our intentions with some of the terms we use. We sometimes use the word "model," sometimes we use the words "model development," and sometimes we even talk of "model testing." What happens as a result is that there is confusion on the part of the applicant, and confusion on

the part of the reviewers as to what the expectation was. It would be better if we just said, "We're looking for you to develop a model." Sometimes we'll say "test a model"; sometimes we just use the word "model." What is it we expected, and what is it you wrote? What that does is lead to too much randomness in the review process. But the danger of correcting that problem is that the more we spell out, the more prescriptive we potentially get. And that wasn't our goal, either, to get overly prescriptive. On the other hand, we recognize that we are going to have to expand our discussions, at times, because there's no common lexicon to communicate with. Let me give you an example. If we say "model development," what happens if you already have a model and you want to test it? Does that mean you're not eligible, that you're non-responsive? That's an issue that came up. Somebody already had a model, and what they wanted to do was actually test it, but it was developed--they weren't proposing to develop the model, they were proposing to test the model. And we said we wanted to develop models. What did that mean? That's where the confusion can come up. Let me give you another example. We say "develop a model," and an applicant puts the whole package together and plans to test it for its effect. And the question is whether we wanted them to test the components of the model so that as they constructed the model there was some amount of evidence as to what was contributing to whatever effects occurred. And does a project that does that get more credit, or points, on technical soundness than one that just

looks at the model in its entirety? We also talk about replicability. In some of our model programs, replicability means, "Can you get others to replicate it?" When we use the word replicability, what we want to know is research about its implementability in other sites, under other conditions, its replicability with other populations; that is, the generalizability of those effects that you have found, not just whether you can get other people to pick up the model and do it. But we don't say that either; we just use the word "replicability." Does it mean we ought to be studying the issues of implementation? Should we be studying the independent variables, and is there an expectation that during the model development the implementability of the model and those other factors will be evaluated? Consequently, it becomes difficult to get you (the applicants) a consistent review, because we are leaving it up to you to decide what to put into the application. We're also leaving it up to the reviewers what to comment on. Our inclination is in the next set of priorities to try to spell that out more clearly. It is imperative that you comment on those priorities. There is no magic in writing the priorities. What they represent is our collective best effort to listen to what you've been saying, to look at what happens with the competitions, and to try to bring all that together in the way we write the priorities. They used to be about four, five or six lines; they stretched to a paragraph; some in the next group of

priorities are going to to be three and four pages long, as we try to communicate the intent better. We are not trying to be prescriptive; we are trying to give you more background information. It used to be that we could put it in your application package as "background information." This year the Division of Educational Services sent out that consolidated application package where everything is listed. Well, they are going to do that with the notice and with the application package. Ideally, with the notice you could see everything that we're going to announce, as the Office of Special Education Programs, in one place, and see it for the year. We're struggling with that, and I can tell you as of Friday last week, we're going to have to break the package apart a little. Otherwise, such areas as the field-initiated research won't make it in the first half of the year. In order to get field-initiated out and anything else we want to do in the first quarter, meaning October to December, we have to get it out in the Federal Register by August. We also have to go through a clearance process within the department, a clearance process within the Office of Management and Budget, and then there's a 30-, 60- or 90-day comment period, depending on the programs we're operating with, that we have to allow for comment. One of the criticisms of the program is that we've been putting out proposed priorities at the same time as we have closing notices out. Then when you make a comment you usually have the response "no change made," because if we change it, we've got to do

something about the competition we just ran. Obviously, this doesn't allow for much public comment. We made a commitment to try not to run a competition without allowing for final publication of the priorities, not just the proposed with a closing note. That extends the timelines to permit feedback. And it should be that way. This year, one more time, we're going to violate that commitment on field-initiated, on the assumption that we won't get a comment back that says, "Don't run it." And probably if we got that comment, we'd say, "No change," unless somebody had a new reason for not running it that we hadn't heard before. And that will let us get it out roughly on the same time schedule you've begun to expect, which is sometime in October, if it all goes well. The remainder of the priorities will be out in the fall, but we'll try to get them out as a total announcement. Now, as a notice, that's fine. What you're going to see is a difference. You're used to seeing our blue application packages in DID. The application packages are going to all be consolidated into one massive Federal Register that will be different from the notice. In doing that, we lost the ability to put in background statements. Those background statements have been reworded so that they're part of the priorities statement now. Before, we had a background and a priority statement, but we've had to put those together because of departmental formatting issues. I have some concerns about it. The best thing we can do this year is get comments from you after you've

had a chance to try to deal with this format, and that will help us within the departmental review process, as to whether this so-called "efficiency" is the way to go to make it clear to you how to prepare an application.

With regard to proposed priorities, if I get ten comments, I feel like I've been overwhelmed by comments. Typically we get comments from the associations and one or two other people. Some of the people in the field don't connect the priorities with what the competitions are going to be. The priorities have a direct relationship; they are going to be the competitions if you don't make comment. The correspondence is one to one. That's not just an activity, that is what the research agenda will be, those priorities. The problem is people see them as proposed priorities and don't connect them with the applications for the competitions. The process is in place, if we use it, for you to help us to look at the content and the substance of particular priorities and whether we should have been asking about other priorities. That is the way to influence that process.

My personal approach is that I start with the concept that what we're dealing with is a marketplace where there are producers, and exchangers, and utilizers of ideation, and that what we're trying to do, in my opinion, in the program, is not to distort the natural marketplace of ideation, but to provide resources so that it is a vibrant, workable marketplace, without the government distorting that marketplace by its support. The

priorities, hopefully, over a few years, deal with the breadth of ideation that you all, and others, represent. In listening to ourselves, you get a sense of being overwhelmed, at times, by the breadth of interest and diversity that we represent. And it seems to me that the program should permit everybody to find a place over a two- to three-year period, given the resources that are available through Part E.

What I'd like to do now is to take a few minutes and try to relate some of the priorities to some goals. We've tried at various times, like most of you, to put together goals and objectives statements, and I keep going back and changing them and refining them, because, at times they don't provide the direction that I'm looking for. The concept of a marketplace, when superimposed on these goals and objectives, tries to give some direction to the intent, so that our goal is to contribute to the ongoing advancement in knowledge and practice through the research process. The process is designed to increase understanding and encourage application of information which, when transferred into practice, will improve the education of infants, toddlers, children and youth with handicaps. This is not to suggest that this is the only way practice will improve. It is to suggest that that's what this program is about--using the research process to do that, while recognizing that there are factors that will also affect practice. But this program is designed to support the research process.

The budget for doing this is something I want to talk about in pretty frank terms. One of our jobs, as administrators of the research program, is trying to plan and manage the resources available to you as a community. In order to do that, you need to have a continuing sense of what we're trying to manage and fit into the various competing priorities, needs, desires, etc. If you want to look across the new monies, you'll notice, in 1987 we funded 70 projects at 9.3 million dollars. In FY88, we funded 57 projects at 4.9 million. Part of that is because we've got a large increase in the research budget in that year, and because we can't spend the money in out-years (we have to spend it in the fiscal year it's appropriated), that's what that bubble looks like. It was created by change in our appropriation level that year. In FY89, you'll notice, we have 54 projects projected at 4.38 million, and in FY90 we have 38 new projects budgeted at 4.7 million. What's happening is that projects are becoming more expensive and lasting longer periods of time, and that affects the number of awards. And that's a dilemma--how to keep juggling the nature of the questions you, as a community, raise. It also affects the issue of the number of people we can support, given the budget level. And if you notice the continuations, which is the second line of that table, in 1987 we had 8.66 million, in 88 we have 12.3 million, we have 12.86 million, we have 12.5 million. The amount of money is holding about constant, in other words; we have about 25 percent of the budget. Of a 17 million

dollar budget, we've got about 4.7 million in new monies, so we're just about at that 25 percent rollover. You will notice that the total number of projects has decreased over that four-year span. The reauthorization hearings for these programs will be this fall. That is the time to let people know what your needs are. We are competing in the research community with other priorities--training personnel preparation and all of the other discretionary programs. But as a community, you need to know what your resources look like, at least as they relate to this one authority.

One of the other issues I want to discuss is out-year budgets--continuation proposals. I'm actually budgeted somewhere out to 1991, at this point. My projections for what I can do, and what we as an Office can do, in the way of offering support and new programs, is contingent upon some assumptions about the out-year budgets. If you come in and give us a flat budget for four years, I have to wonder, "Now, are they really not going to come back and ask for more money." At the same time, somebody else is showing a ten percent inflationary progression, which means that you can have projects that start at $200,000 ending at $300,000. It gets out of hand because I can't plan for the new priorities. In the past, we have not had to be very arbitrary. At this point we're running 23 competitions. That is, with our continuations and new projects, we're trying to manage 23 different priorities. And it is essential that we control those out-year budgets. So

sometimes we're getting on the phone at this point, because I don't know where to cut the budget. I could arbitrarily tell our project officers, "Go in and cut it somewhere." But I'll say to you, "This is what's available. You go cut it"--because if we don't cut it, we may have 25 projects instead of 38 projects. In the past, we've had more latitude to deal with these out-year budgets than we currently have, because we have so many of them to try to manage. If we were off on 78 projects, what we ought to do is say, "How much are we off?" and multiply it by 78, and then subtract that from the new projects. Everytime somebody asks us, "Can we have a little bit more?", what we're trying to do is to juggle your need against what that's doing to the new competitions. That's the source of the pressure that you get from us at times; we're trying to figure out the appropriate balance between the news and the continuations. And, because the continuations may come before or after the news, it's not an orderly process. They're scattered. Therefore, we have to be careful, because otherwise the last person in, not for any other reason than they were last in, will run out of money. At the same time, we're trying to zero those budgets out so that we don't send any money back to the treasury at the end of the year. That's why you sometimes see us put you on hold. That's the "fudge factor" at the end of the year--to see if we can even it up. That is the background of what at times you see as negotiation issues; if you have a feeling that there is something

going on, that's what is going on. In my opinion, this is also something to be concerned about as a community: How do we balance the nature of the questions we have with the need to support a large community, in a way in which the probabilities of finding support are reasonable? We feel the pressure of that, of not knowing how to deal with the questions you're asking in light of the resources available and the probabilities of finding funding.

The first objective we have is to increase understanding through the production of knowledge by stimulating and supporting research activities to improve the education of infants, toddlers, children and youth with handicaps. The priorities for 1989 and 1990 are in the midst of finishing departmental clearance and have not made it to OMB yet. We hope that, within the next month and a half, we will complete the clearance process so that we can get these proposed regulations out to you. But that means that today I cannot spell out those priorities in detail. I will, on the other hand, talk about some of the areas that I think will align themselves with those priorities.

There will be a field-initiated research program. There will be in 1989 a student-initiated research program. We are proposing to drop it in 1990 and to put in its place an initial career award program for people in the first three years upon receiving their doctorate. And we are asking for comment about dropping that student-initiated research program. I've mentioned it a

number of times at conferences, and I've mentioned it here. We've had objectives for that program, and the response we get to the program doesn't seem to align with our goals. And in light of other feedback that we have received, we think that an initial career award might better meet some of our objectives. But we are asking for comment on whether the program should be dropped. If we do not hear from people, it will be dropped.

We are going to institute, we think, some type of program that tries to deal with a range of problems that we're not happy about, nor are you, from what I can gather. We talked earlier about the issue of the 30 points and the 40 points and the types of projects that seem to be getting approved and disapproved. For example, there may be an applicant who has new methodologies, or a content that's new where the methodology is not worked out, or new questions. There may be someone who is foraging on the edge of a forest, and it's hard to be elegant when you're just beating away at the trees and brush to get in--there's no highway or road in to that inquiry. Those proposals don't survive. The comments, oftentimes, are that they're good ideas, and why doesn't the investigator go back and work on it some more? But that's why they're asking for the money, so that they can work on it some more. Our thought is to try to structure a program where we could deal with some form of what I will call pilot studies. This program would give these people an opportunity to work with some support.

Another problem area is that we get applicants who want to do a synthesis. If somebody wants to do a synthesis, and that is competed against somebody else's three-year or four-year research project, it doesn't survive very well. They're asking for maybe for $35,000, $40,000, $50,000, and it gets killed against some elegant $350,000 four-year project. That's the kind of thing we're trying to find a place for. We have applicants who want to look at extant databases. They have the data they can get their hands on, but they're looking for some support to analyze it, to add to it a little bit. Those applications don't do very well. There are some people who have come in wanting to do some sort of utilization study on the same scale, and they don't tend to do very well either. We're trying to find some vehicle, some umbrella, that's both of different duration and with a different amount of funding than field-initiated, but that is basically a derivative of field-initiated that would let people take that divergent set of ideas and find some support. That will be in the proposed priorities for 1989.

We have looked at a range of administrative instructional issues: How to teach children? How to organize to teach children? We've looked at service delivery issues, but what we've not looked at, in recent years, is what we're teaching, including some of the implications of the scope, the sequence, the complexity, the information density as they relate to the learning

characteristics and needs of handicapped children. We will propose some areas that deal with examining and analyzing some of the implications of not just how to teach children, but what we're teaching.

I want to make sure that we understand that special education and educating handicapped children are two different things--we can educate handicapped children in any setting, regular or special; anybody could be delivering that service. That's not true when we talk about special education--then, depending on the state, only certain people can deliver it. There are certain definitions of what is special education and what is not special education, distinct from the education of handicapped children. I want you to know that on our applications we're trying to communicate that distinction between the two terms. When we talk about educating handicapped children, that could be in regular or special education. If we talk about special education, we're talking about that part of the child's educational experiences that meets the definition of special education.

One of the concepts we are addressing is that teachers, in educating handicapped children, are meant to be able to individualize and adapt instruction. A number of the questions we've had really seem to be questions of contextual fit; that is, how do our expectations fit with the realities of the context within which we want people to perform. We talk about teacher planning. Are we talking about unit planning? Are we talking

about lesson planning? Are we talking about individual planning for a child, as we start asking teachers to do individualized instruction? Where do they plan for that? Is it done at the unit level? Is it done at the lesson level? Is it done on an individual-child-basis daily? When, in fact, do we expect that to happen, and realistically, how many times and with how many kids can that happen? And what seems to foster it, and what seems to impede it? Similarly, with adaptation, how is that going to happen? We are going to see an area of research which tries to get at some of these thick questions concerning teachers and the types of things we want them to do that we think will improve the education of handicapped children. We are trying to provide some opportunity for inquiry and intervention work in that area.

Another area is one that we have been addressing through an institute, but that we will open up now to more single investigative inquiry. That is the area of non-dominant language studies. We recognize that the school has its culture, the children have their culture, and the families have their culture. They also have their languages. In some instances there's a cultural incompatibility, and in other instances there's a language incompatibility. For these non-dominant language groups, we are trying to provide some resources to permit further investigation into ways that the language and cultural compatibilities can be made as consonant as possible.

Another area that we are supporting started off as an SED, or behavioral disorder (depending on your preference), line of inquiry. Over the last two years, as many of you are aware, we ran competitions concerning seriously emotionally disturbed children. At this point we feel that problems of getting seriously emotionally disturbed children into their neighborhood and community schools is probably more a problem of figuring out how to get mental health services and school services connected. Schools will tell you, "Treatment is not our responsibility." We have a hard time connecting with the mental health services. The actual educational interventions that we've seen in the last two years, quite honestly, don't look terribly different than Project Re-add (?). The educational part of it isn't changing that much, but that's not what's causing the children to be placed out of school into separate facilities, etc. The question really is how to get some better linkage between education and treatment, as opposed to just stabilization and maintenance of behavior for the children. Consequently, research didn't seem to be the next step. The problem seemed to be requiring some form of systems change. Instead we moved the problem to one that was a little broader. While SED children drop out, or leave school, at a rate higher than any other category, there are other children, clearly, who are leaving school at nearly the same rates. The area we are looking at is moving to an "at-risk" (of leaving school) category and changing

the constructs we are looking at to try to identify the problems. For example, if it's predicted that kids are going to drop out because they get poor grades, the answer isn't really to give them good grades; that's just dealing with the symptom. We're going to try to move you to a construct that we're going to label engagement; that is, how do you get children, in a broader sense, engaged in school (tape turned over).

We're going to try to do something that we've been getting input on, but when it comes to us, people are asking for assessment areas. Typically what we see is a proposal. Somebody either wants to develop a test or norm a test, without, always, a very compelling reason as to why we need one more test, at least from a knowledge advancement point of view.

In the area of technology, we're going to try to provide an opportunity for using technology as a vehicle for either advancing the types of constructs we're measuring, the items stimulus that we're using, the response categories, or the scoring criteria. The idea is to use that not to develop tests, but to advance assessment practice. We're trying to use the technology as a vehicle to break what seems to be a static mode, possibly constrained by paper and pencil realities. Possibly the use of the multi-media available in technology advances will force us to think a little further ahead as to how we might press the issues of assessment.

These are the areas that you will probably see in some form or another as the proposed priorities that come from the areas of interest that we've been able to identify. The priorities that are going to be announced will cover a two-year period. They cover 1989 and 1990, because by law we have to publish the priorities for the research program two years at a time. Again, what I would encourage you to do is look at them closely and please communicate your thoughts about them, or about ones that you feel we've missed altogether. What I'd like to do now is open it up and let you ask questions, having given you that general information to work from. Naomi.

Q. I hope this doesn't seem impertinent because SEP has been very good to me, especially this year. I'm curious about how these research priorities, this litany of research priorities, gets established? Who comes up with these ideas? Some of them are wonderful. Because I know that in my research program, my next good idea comes out of my last good idea. And I'm wondering why, or what proportion of the research money is in directed priorities? And why it isn't in all of them, in field-initiated, so that researchers can pursue a line of research without having to change, or at least change our papers, to get re-focused to meet new directed priorities year after year after year?

A. Let me see if I can break that up. First of all, I think it's important to say it's real nice when people come up to me and say thank you for a grant, but if I accepted that thank you, I would have ten people who didn't get funded looking for my neck. And since I really don't want that ten looking for my neck, I can't say that I had nothing to do with those, but that I did have something to do with someone else getting funded. There is a peer review system, and it's your colleagues who, year in and year out, competition after competition, make the selection process. After they leave, it would take a real error before the Office of Special Education Programs would override the rank order derived from the peer reviews and recommendations. It is

not a matter of judgment; it is not one of preference. The only opportunity we have to influence that award system is if an error is made, and then it's going to have to be a whopping one for us to interfere. So, while I'd like to thank Gene and Naomi for their graciousness, it really is a peer review system. That's why it seems important for our office to keep a communication going. For the system to work, it takes 500 people, in some level of synchronization, to make it work, or it's random.

To go to the priorities, let me assure you that I read a summary of every new project going out, and I read what was accomplished and what was proposed on every continuation or summary. The staff reads that stuff in detail. Typically, we have communication, at some point or another, with many of you. Let me assure you that your findings and your discussions with us seriously influence our own thinking, in trying to say, "How do we incorporate that?" The question is not one of exclusion; our attempt is to keep trying to put the program together so that it permits the maximum amount of inclusion of the community with the wide range of methodology and ideation that are out there. What happens is the field gives us some ideas, your research produces some, clearly, and the administration produces some. If we get comments, which we have not been getting, they do influence the process. Remember, they are proposed, they are not final. The attempt is for us to aggregate and cluster them in a way that we think, over a two-year period, will permit the pluralism that's

in the community to find a home. I can tell you that while some priorities are going to hit some people, they miss others. Not every priority will please everybody. They are not designed to; that's not who we are as a community, nor should we become that narrow in focus. What's not happening is we don't get good feedback from the research community to the proposed priorities. People aren't aware of what the process is.

Q. Along that line, if we think back to yesterday's lunch, we have to be sensitive about how we get funds, and you mentioned some things like the administration's position and input into priorities. Certainly there are some things where maybe it is to our advantage to support, or not negatively comment, on these priorities as they're listed. And if you could help us with that, maybe we could help you. But most of the people that I've talked with would rather not see a list of priorities this year and another list of priorities next year or two years later. We tend to feel that good research would find its home in field-initiated competitions, maybe even have two or three field-initiated competitions. Maybe one could say, within each of those two or three field-initiated competitions, that certain things are of interest, but not have a binding kind of thing where, if you don't fit into categories one through seven, you're then in the small pot called field-initiated. So if you could give us some guidance, we could do more than just write in and say, "Please don't do priorities, just do field-initiated research."

A. Let me answer Naomi's question, which was, what percentage of the budget is in field-initiated? In any given year, I think, off the top of my head, it's around 6.5 million. Anywhere between 6.5 to 7 million. It goes up and down depending on any given year. It'll probably creep up over 7 million at the moment. So, you're running around 40-45 percent of the budget in that field-initited category. Some of that money is also being used for institutes, out of that 17.2 million, so that some of you have asked for five-year, large, multiple-investigator inquiries. Some of the money is used for institutes, some of the money is used for field-initiated, and some of the field-initiated are five years; but they are not necessarily programmatic or multiple investigator inquiry. They tend to be different varieties. So there's also five-year support, but for other than institute support, we have the directed research priorities. One of the things we have been striving for is to get those into some streams. I have a copy here of something we put together on our competitions. Maybe I can get Kathleen to send you a copy. Let me give credit for it to Ed Kameenui. Ed tried to bring some ordering to a number of competitions we've run over the last several years, starting with Enhancing Instructional Program Options in 1985, which looked at the range of pre-referral program options for providing instructional and evaluative services in regular education. In 1986, we ran a second directed research program called Increasing Teaching and

Learning Efficiency. These projects were designed to build upon the teacher and school effectiveness research literature, by looking at what amount of the variance (if we put in effective teaching, effective school practices) could be accounted for in educating handicapped children. In 1987 we ran a competition called Educating Learning Disabled and Mildly Handicapped Students in General Ed Classrooms, and there we tried to look at how you could deliver special ed services in regular ed classrooms. So you had this progression; it was all in a stream, but it moved through a set of variables. We then came out in 1988 with the School Building Models competition, which was an attempt to take all of that, put it together into a more comprehensive package and say, "Could you take the individual parts?" and "Would they sum into a whole?" That was this year's competition. So there's a progression in trying to advance the inquiry. In each year there were seven, eight, nine projects, or whatever, funded in that progression of studies, where the knowledge was advancing down that stream. What we've been trying to do (that's probably our best example to date), is to make predictable what those streams are, so that while the particular priority may change, the change is just advancing that line of inquiry rather than letting it become stagnant. We try to move that part of our "portfolio" ahead in a more cumulative fashion than might happen otherwise, in trying to balance the directed competitions with the field-initiated competitions.

To answer Lyle's question, the politics, in my opinion, of the priorities are that the program belongs to the community. That program is authorized and appropriated to conduct research, and you, as a performing community, are given a number of opportunities to influence the priorities. The only politics is in expressing your viewpoint. You need to say what your feelings are, and that program ought to be responsive to the community. But if the community is quiet, then what you are left with is that we try to make the best professional judgements we can, internally, with the information available to us, given the various forces I've described. There's nothing mystical, I want to assure you, behind that. And there's nothing I won't talk about, if you want to ask where they're coming from. I don't know if that gets at it enough.

Q. Can I ask you a question about the student-initiated you just mentioned? Is it possible to have a competition in which you could open it for new investigators and for which many students (a few words inaudible) could still apply? Is it possible to have both, rather that one versus the other?

A. Monetarily, the answer is probably "yes." There's some question as to the return on investment, which might be worth talking about a little. The other reality that's happening is that I have, as of next week, a Branch Chief and one staff person in the directed research branch. There are only so many

competitions that we can run, given our staffing. Part of our problem is that the process is extending us to the limits of our resources, in trying not to make review errors, as well as not sending out poor priorities at the front end of the system. I will tell you it is the first time in 18 years in government that we've begun to look at our priorities, not only according to what the field needs, but also our ability just to get the competitions developed, announced, reviewed, and back out again. The realities are, if you comment, we'll see what we can do with it, if it seems to be the voice of the community.

Q. Can I follow-up on that? What if about 15 or 20 people commented when the priorities came out, suggesting that you not have specific competitions for these priorities, but you have two competitions, or three competitions in the year in which you have certainly made known, through the literature, some of the areas that are of concern, but not as a specific competition? It seems like you would allow the freedom for any strand to develop, if there is good science to develop it. It seems like you would cut your costs of competition management significantly, if only by reducing the number of different things that have to be put into the Federal Register. There are also a lot of other cost savings you would have there. It seems like there might be some value all the way around, and it might promote more creative science.

A. We would take a good hard look at that, Lyle. What that is called, by the way, is an invitational priority, which we do have

sometimes. That means you're not given any particular points for responding; those are just the areas of particular interest that we're trying to encourage. Sometimes we do go with those.

Q. Two questions. What about research on families of handicapped children?

A. In the example I was talking about where we are trying to move the construct to engagement, I am assuming that the family is a critical piece of achieving engagement--it's not the only one--but I'm assuming some people could find a home for families there. I think the issue of non-dominant languages has the potential for including work on families.

Q. O.K. The second question is, would I be considered as a reviewer if somebody submitted a project from North Carolina?

A. Under the registry system, that issue has to be dealt with. Our request was for the answer to be yes, and what we would have done is had you on a panel other that one where there was a North Carolina application. They let us do that only in the field-initiated research competition, and considered you in conflict of interest in the other competitions this year. The year before we ran all the competitions under your being eligible to be a reviewer. This year they changed their minds on us, and it has been a back-and-forth interpretation, over the last several years. We're hoping that this registry issue will cause them to swing back to saying, "No, you would be an eligible reviewer."

Q. It's hard to understand why NIH is able to do this all the time, and you're not.

A. Well, it's individuals. It's interpretations. You're not dealing with something I can put my finger on, at least as I've looked at it, and be able to nail it. You go to where the source of the decisions are and it's their interpretations.

Q. When you want feedback on your priorities, my question is, what structures do you provide to have that feedback and how broad-based are those structures?

A. At this point, there's no structure at all. It says "write us a letter," and they give you a name and an address.

Q. I think that if you really want the feedback, you're going to have to broaden the base and create the structures for the feedback to come in, because you give us the priorities, and this is the only opportunity we have. In terms of us participating in setting the priorities and getting direct feedback on what priorities come out, I think more structure needs to be there.

A. I'd like to go back to Naomi's question and the theme that was addressed in a couple of the others, and that's the whole issue of the presence of directed programs versus the field-initiated, or open checkbook. For those of us who work on the other side of it with the senator's office and those sorts of

things, I don't see how you can run this system unless you have directed programs. I might debate with you the political influence--I'm not sure it is totally apolitical, but I think you can't establish a case for funding if you say, "We're going to tell you what we're going to work on. We're going to leave it up to field-initiated processes, where directions are picked by individual researchers and programmatic lines of researches are going to be conducted. And we're going to assure you a quality control process but no directives." I can't see any of us building support for funding through the processes that exist now, unless there is some crystallization of direction at the front end, and not just a process of recording accomplishments at the other end. A few years ago we went through some pretty rough times trying to protect this funding, and I think the research community, as far as I was concerned, was the most naive and least responsible and least present when we were fighting for those dollars. Service people were out there, training people were to some extent, but the research community seemed to be very unaware of what could be done and what had to be done at that particular level. If you work at that level, with the congressional staff, and you see what they have to deal with on a day-to-day basis, I don't think they could do their job without some crystallization of direction. You're not going to get the dollars, I don't think, unless you're prepared to do some front-end directing. Where that might come from, is another issue.

Q. Would it be possible that these meetings might enlarge the project directors (rest of question inaudible).

A. Certainly the "have-nots" would claim that, let me assure you of that. I've seen a couple of things happen. I know that Sid Miller of the Division of Research at CEC has talked to me about trying to figure out a mechanism for bringing up suggestions. I saw something that National Inquiry tried to put together as an initial set of research agenda issues that I looked at. I don't know that there is a single vehicle that you'd want for that, but I do think that some systematic ways of inputting--in order to have opportunities for yourselves, they have to be pretty robust priorities to allow enough people to compete. You might be interested in knowing, actually, that on most of the priorities, we're ending up in the neighborhood of 40-50 applications to a directed research priority. We're getting about 165 or so to field-initiated. I'm trying to remember about the student-initiated; if one of the staff is here that remembers they could share it with me. Does someone remember the number we had this year? About 40, Bea says. This is just to give you a sense about what the volume is, what the response is. But I do think the community needs some opportunity to hash it out, to try to think about it. What happens, and what you don't want it to deteriorate into, in my opinion, is just individual interests, being self-serving. And you have to get it so that either everybody sends in their individual pieces and we

try to separate them up into some streams--that might be a good way to go at it. But I'm certainly open to any suggestions in trying to facilitate exchanges that would let that happen to all communities.

Q. When the panel meets to review a directed research competition, that seems to be the best opportunity to get feedback--it's after the fact, once it's already out of the barn. But my recollection is, after having read those applications, some real good feedback (rest of question inaudible)

A. And that is part of the input we get. That's one more example of where we're getting it--from the panels after they've looked at them. It ends up being difficult at our end for reasons that you're not even aware: When we call and ask people to be panelists, it's supposed to be a confidential system. What happens is you mention, "I'm coming to Washington" to somebody. The next thing I know there are all sorts of phone calls going on. It's not in your best interest to not keep it confidential when you've been called. Quite honestly, there is less opportunity for the system to get convoluted if, when you get a call to review, it's treated as confidential. Otherwise they are not blind reviews, and the system has the potential, at least, for some abuses. And it is in your interest to operate that way.

Q. We were just talking back here whether that really is the case because, again, to mention NIH, everybody knows the panels there, and it's public information when the meetings are held.

A. There are pros and cons to what I'm going to say. We guarantee three independent reviews, and we share those with you, for better or worse. All you have to do is look at the variability in the reviews you get back, and you know you've got three independent reviews. Now remember, that's not what they're offering you, and there are pros and cons to that. I'm not suggesting that ours is foolproof--it's just a different system. Consequently, the confidentiality operates a little differently.

If we have no other questions, I would like to once again thank everybody and ask you to fill in those evaluation forms. Your ability to help us figure out how to make this a rewarding day and a half and worth your time really is critical--I think the people who are on the planning committee will tell you we really did use that information. So, we encourage you to send in those evaluation forms or give them to us. Thank you and have a safe trip home.